

Revenge Of Th

When Big Bill Shakespeare (landlord of *The Pig & Whistle*) said, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," he hadn't seen any of the marquee mania that Hollywood has served up! **Richard Anderson** takes a look at some monikers that are a great deal more memorable than the movies they support. So if you thought *The Remains Of The Day* was a cannibal movie, read on...



For most cinemagoers, the title tends to tell it all. There can be little doubt what you can expect when you hand over your hard-earned dosh at the box office to see the likes of *Carry On Cleo*, *Aliens*, *The Lover*, or *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*.

Yet movie producers have never been averse to dreaming up obscure, absurd, or downright loony names for their new product as a way of catching the jaded public's attention. Quite often this is a way of disguising the truth that the picture is as appealing as dog vomit, but more often than not it's just for fun.

Mike Myers made his name as a comic on *Saturday Night Live* on American TV, and it wasn't surprising that the spin-off *Wayne's World* flicks spent much of their time poking fun at the big and small screen. So when it came time to branch out into a comedy thriller without his pal Dana Carvey, he reached for the jocular headline *So I Married an Axe Murderer*.

In this brand new Columbia Tristar release, downtown 'beat' poet Mike constructs musical monologues about his disastrous relationships with women, until the seemingly impossible hap-

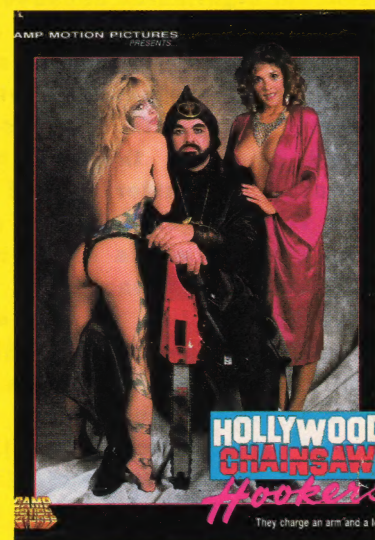
pens - the girl of his dreams (Nancy Travis) enters his life and sweeps him off his feet. Not believing his luck, he persuades her to marry him against her constant protestations, and it's only after the nuptials that he learns that her previous husbands have all met gruesome ends ...

Not only does Myers pull off several finely-judged performances (his best 'incarnation' is as the hero's cantankerous Glaswegian father), but he proves conclusively that it is possible to have a film with a ridiculous title and do well at the box office.

Certain genres draw loopy names much more easily than others. In the horror world, for example, it isn't enough to have ludicrous monsters - you have to have inane tag-lines for them as well. Bela Lugosi, one of the cinema's greatest Draculas, variously starred in *Zombies on Broadway* (1945), *Mother Riley Meets the Vampire* (1952), and the infamous *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959) in which alien beings requested help from human zombies.

Who could forget (or wish to remember?) Herman Cohen's teen angst double: *I Was A Teenage Werewolf*, and *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* (both 1957), which prefigured the more recent *Teen Wolf* movies with Michael J. Fox.

Fringe directors took a particular delight in spawning B-movie specials like Ted V. Mikels' *The Astro Zombies* (1967, with John Carradine!) and *The Corpse Grinders*. The outrageous Gordon Herschell Lewis - now a cult legend - was famous for inventing titles like



Gruesome Twosome, *Wizard of Gore* (1970), and *The Gore-Gore Girls*. Stretching credibility even further was William Beaudine, who had John Carradine in more nefarious dealings in *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula* (1966), and its successor, *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter* (1966).

One of the undisputed queens of this horror sub-culture is the diminutive blonde nymphet Linnea Quigley, who used to play guitar for the L.A. band The Skirts until she was chosen to dance naked in a moonlit cemetery and get devoured by zombies in *Return of the Living Dead*. Her reward has been to star in such Z-rated but immensely enjoyable fare as *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama* (1987), *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* (1988), *Creepozoids* (1987), and *Space Sluts in the Slammer* (1992).

The most recent champion of naff horror is indisputably Lloyd Kaufman, whose Troma movies specialise in inventing increasingly preposterous descriptions of some pretty thin story lines. His best known creation is *The Toxic Avenger* (1985), the mop-wielding radioactive mutant dedicated to doing good, fighting evil, and spending the following two sequels encouraging girlfriend Phoebe Legere to get her kit off.

His other low-life hits have included

e Killer Titles!





Sergeant Kabukiman NYPD, Class of Nuke 'Em High, The Good The Bad & the Subhumanoid, Rabid Grannies, Chopper Chicks in Zombietown, and Dead Dudes in the House. Not surprisingly, imitative rip-offs like *Revenge of the Radioactive Reporter* (1989) and *Stuff Stephanie in the Incinerator* abound.

But it would be unfair to tarnish only the chillers with a bad reputation. Another favourite mining area for terrible puns and flip phrases is the 'coming of age' film, where attempts to stay cool with contemporary youngsters produced some hilarious results.

In the Fifties, a St. Louis cinema released the double bill of *Curse of a Teenage Nazi* with *Unwed Mothers*, and backed up this sex and violence teen shlocker with billboards announcing: "Trapped, They Defied Their Killer Captors... See Women Enslaved by Nazi Werewolves Now It Can Be Told...", etc., etc. 'Delinquent' movies arose with titles like *Hot Rod Rumble*, *Dragstrip Riot*, *Daddy-O*, and *The Cool & The Crazy* - all of which fastened the idea that the youth of America was perpetually obsessed with sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll, cars, and bad acting (i.e. much like the youth of today).

Once again there were interesting variations on the general theme. *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (1957) was essentially a typical B-flick about teenagers and their hot-rods, but they become infiltrated by some wicked aliens who plot to undermine the youngsters by injecting alcohol into their bloodstream. How evil can you get? Perhaps it was the lukewarm reception given its premiere that caused the filmmakers to later retitle it *The Hell Creatures*, but with little improvement at the box office.

One film that even the teenagers walked out of in droves was the curious *Sex Kittens Go To College* (1960), despite starring the Monroe lookalike Mamie van Doren, Tuesday Weld, Mijanou Bardot (Brigitte's sister), Jackie Coogan, and Charles Chaplin Jr. A feeble plot about strippers, robots, and college may have had something to do with it, and even two further title alterations (*Sexpots* 20 VIDEO WORLD

Go To College, and Teacher Was a Sexpot) couldn't rescue it from speedy oblivion.

The mid-Sixties had a brief flirtation with Beach movies in which gangs of wholesome youths frolicked with plastic balls and occasionally splashed each other. So there was suddenly a plague of posters advertising bikini girls with such titles as *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965), *Hot Rod Hullabaloo* (1966), *How To Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965), and *Winter a Go-Go* (1965), where essentially the same gang relocated to a ski lodge.

This was also the same era that showcased Ray Dennis Steckler's amazing *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies* (1964)! Apart from being one of the longest titles in movie history (later changed to *Teenage Psycho Meets Bloody Mary*), it managed to combine carnival freaks, fortune tellers, hypnotism, murder, and beatniks into 82 kaleidoscopic minutes. Two years later he produced and directed a Batman and Robin spoof called *Rat Pfink and Boo Boo* that is still regarded fondly by some trash fans.

It's perhaps easier to accept hilarious headlines when the material is supposed to be a comedy. John Landis' *Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977), for example, was an amusing pastiche of skits parodying kung fu films, TV commercials, and soft-core porn, while *I Bought a Vampire Motorcycle* (1989) was a fang-in-cheek horror about a Harley from Hell pursued by garlic-breathing inspector Michael Elphick!

Sci-fi flicks in particular indulged their love of the bizarre. *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* (1978) not only had humans gobbled by grossly irradiated veg, but contained the immortal song: 'I think I'm gonna miss her/ A tomato ate my sister!' Similar hoots could be enjoyed in *Basket Case* (1982), *Return of Swamp Thing* (1989), *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death* (1988), and the

mega-successful *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Thrill to *The Monster From Green Hell*! Gasp at *Navy Versus the Night Monsters*! Be shocked

by *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*! The potential for new absurdities is endless. After all, who would have thought that a sci-fi film with a title such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* would end up being one of the biggest moneyspinners of all time?

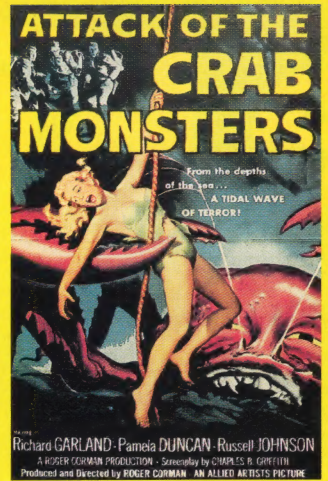
For it wouldn't be fair to omit the wacky 'wunderkinds' from this survey - the meaningless monikers who struck gold. Jack Nicholson, for instance, began by making 'psychedelic' movies like *Psych-Out* (1968) and ended up in a nut-house in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). Although no-one still knows what in hell Milos Forman's title means, he still managed to walk away with a hatful of Oscars.

Picnic at Hanging Rock (1976) had as much to do with a gallows feast as *Dogs in Space* (1986) had to do with animal astronauts, yet only one of these Aussie independents made the big league (despite the pulling power of In Xcess' Michael Hutchence).

No doubt *So I Married an Axe Murderer* will clean up at the video box office, following in the wake of other substantial comedy hits like *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*, *Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead*, and *My Stepmother is an Alien*.

So remember, if you ever get the chance to make a movie yourself, all you need is a loony title matched to a mutant, drug-taking, beach-partying monster and a horde of foxy blonde babes with a love of full moons, and you've got a potential winner.

Sounds like the latest Merchant/Ivory production to me...



TEN COPIES OF SO I MARRIED AN AXE MURDERER TO BE WON!

You axed for it, and here it is! If you loved Wayne's World, then you're gonna hurl over *So I Married An Axe Murderer*, a very funny film with a very stupid title. To be in with a chance of adding this to your collection all you have to do is tell us the name of the male star who admitted I Was A Teenage Werewolf. Answers on a postcard, please, to "What a chopper!" Video World, Northern & Shell Tower, 4 Selsdon Way, London E14 9GL.